

3.6 Land Use, Agriculture, and Recreation

EXISTING LAND USES

The proposed project area is located in the rural town of Canby, Modoc County, California. Modoc County could be called the “land unknown to most Californians” (Shasta Cascade 2002). Modoc County is located in the extreme northeast corner of California, is bounded on the north by the State of Oregon, on the east by the State of Nevada, on the south by Plumas County, and on the west by Siskiyou County. It is rectangular in shape, measures nearly 100 miles east and west, by nearly 60 miles north and south, and contains 2,750,000 acres. It was originally a portion of Siskiyou County, but was formed into a separate county by an Act of the Legislature of 1874. The county name originated from the celebrated Indian tribe whose resistance to the progress of the whites in their settlement resulted in the Modoc War in the northwestern part of the county and the adjoining part of Oregon.

Land Use

Modoc County is dominated by federal land ownership, with 61% of the land managed by the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Of the remaining 39%, 7% is in Timber Preserve Zones and cannot be used for other than timber production. Another 6% of the land in the County is used for intensive (irrigated) agricultural purposes (Mintier Harnish 1988a). The principal economic resources of the County are its forests, agricultural lands and recreation-tourism.

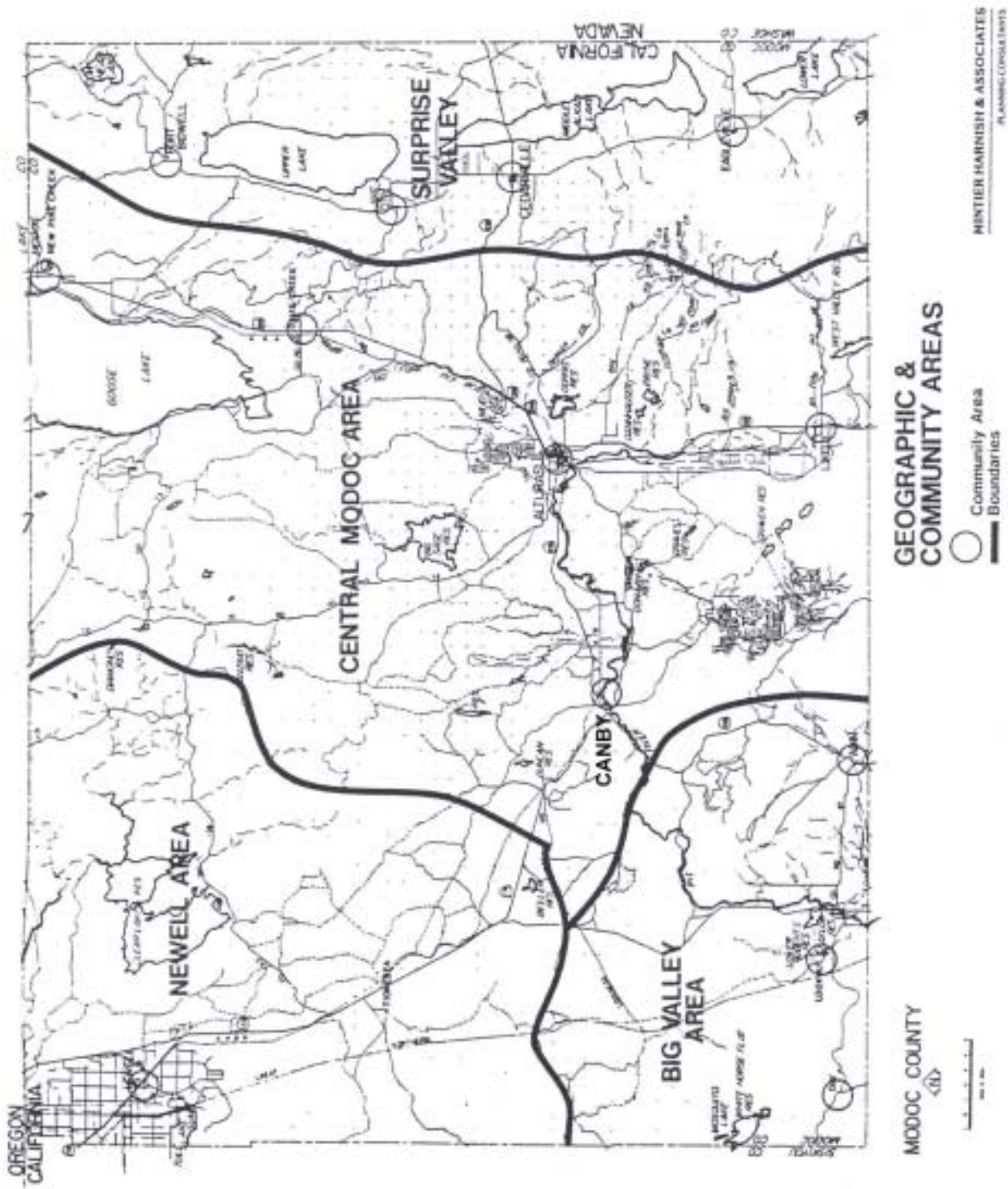
The Modoc County General Plan divides the county into four geographic areas: Newel, Big Valley, Central Modoc and Surprise Valley. Canby is located in the Central Modoc community area (Figure 3.6-1). The Central Modoc area is bounded by the County lines north and south, the crest of the Warner Mountains to the east and the geographic barrier posed by the Modoc National Forest to the west.

In 1988 the town of Canby consisted of 26 acres of residential land use and 160 acres of vacant land out of a total of 201.8 acres. A considerable number of acres of land in Canby are now owned by the I'SOT community. Currently, land designated as vacant land in the Modoc County General Plan within the project area is a mix of dry grazing land and wetlands (Figure 3.6-2a), while the remainder of the I'SOT community is designated residential. Figure 3.6-2b shows an updated land use map of the same general area. When there are lands that are “Unclassified”, such as Vacant Lands, these lands revert back to the General Plan map. Those lands that are not officially designated as Agriculture Exclusive, Publicly Owned Lands, Timber Protection Area, Rural Residential or Urban Areas are considered to be Agriculture General (Alvord 2002).

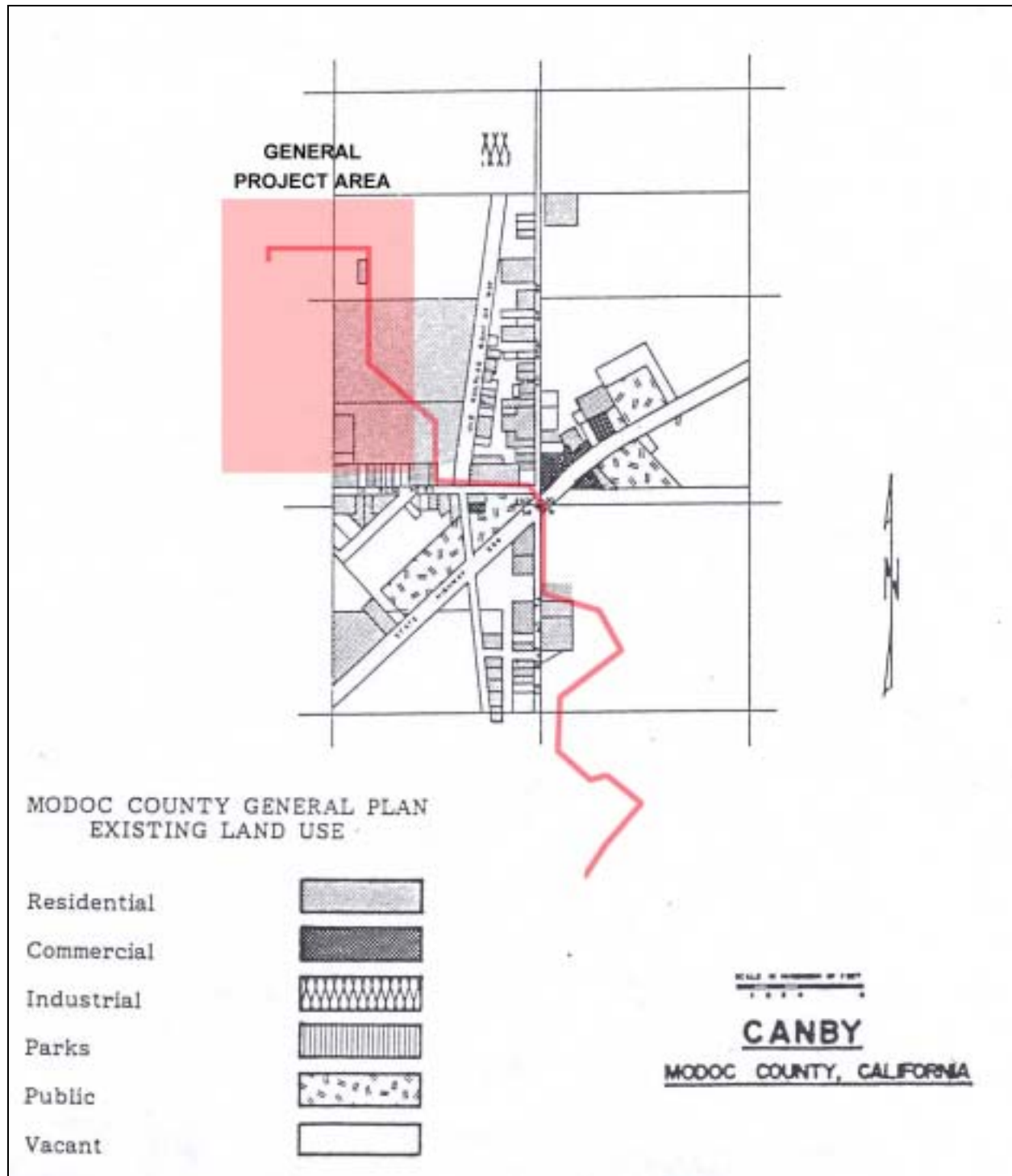
Agriculture

Alfalfa hay is Modoc County's major agricultural industry. In 2000, the county ranked 42nd in agricultural production in the state, with a total gross production value of \$68.8 million. Crop sales accounted for 64 percent of the market value, while livestock sales accounted for 36 percent of the market value. The top five crops in Modoc County, by value, included: alfalfa hay, timber, cattle & calves, potatoes, and pasture & range (Modoc County Farm Bureau 2002). The most recent Census of Agriculture showed an increase of 2 percent in the average size of farms in Modoc County, with a decrease of 3 percent in the amount of land in farms (USDA 1997).

Figure 3.6-1: Geographic and Community Areas

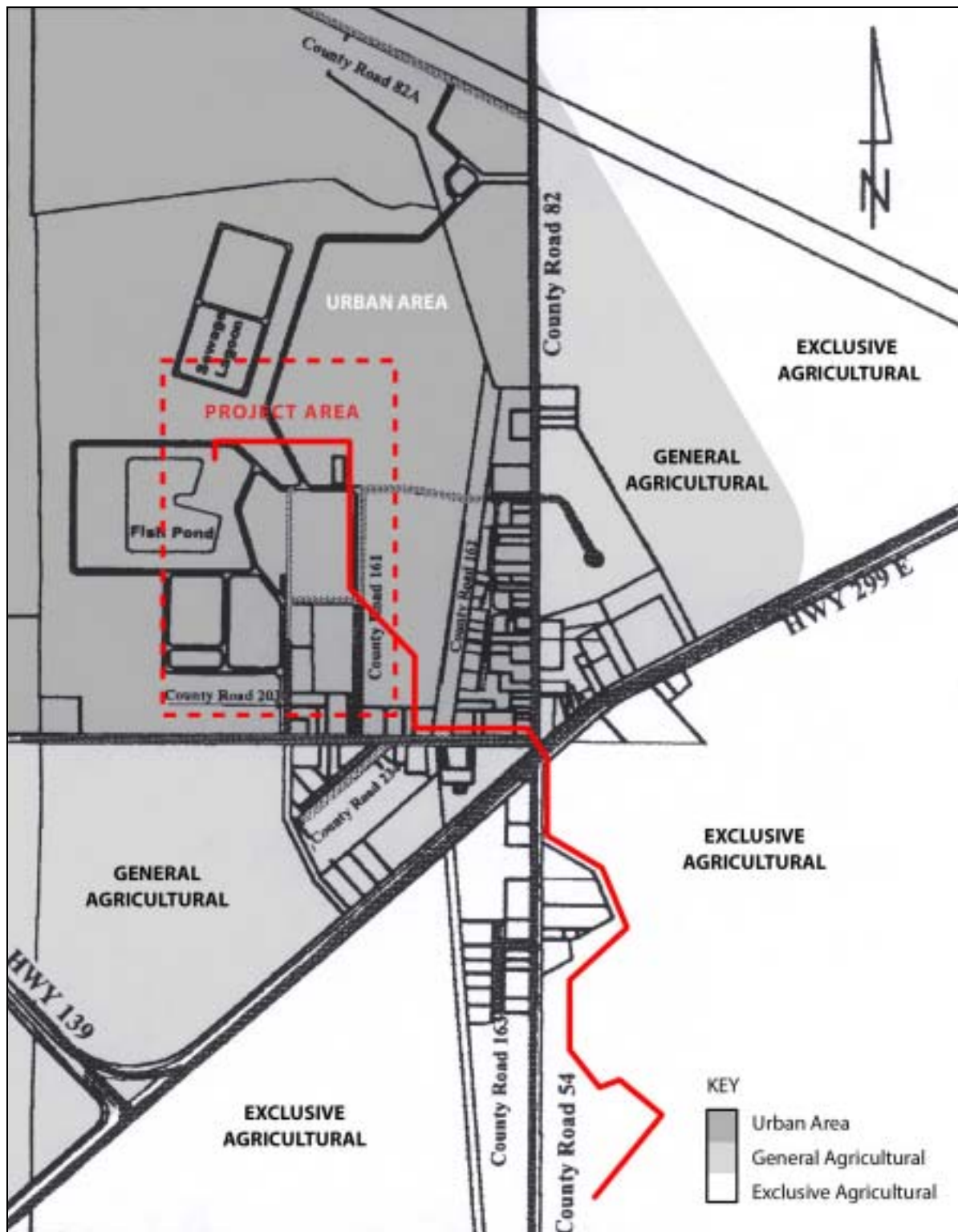


SOURCE: Modoc County General Plan 1988

Figure 3.6-2a: Modoc County General Plan Land Use 1988

SOURCE: Modoc County General Plan 1988

Figure 3.6-2b: Modoc County General Plan Existing Land Use 2002



SOURCE: Modoc County Planning and MHA 2002

In central Modoc County the livestock industry is the most important facet of agricultural production. Nearly all farm operations use public lands to graze their cattle. The Alturas-Canby area had more acreage under production for each crop than either of the other areas in 1982. The main agricultural land uses in the Canby project area are a combination of irrigated cropland, dry cropland, and grazed land (irrigated and non-irrigated).

Important Farmlands. In 1984, The California Department of Conservation (DOC), Division of Land Resource Protection, prepared Advisory Guidelines and preliminary maps for the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring program. The Guidelines identified five categories of farmlands: prime farmlands, farmlands of statewide importance, unique farmlands, farmlands of local importance and grazing lands. The designations by the DOC correspond to the Important Farmlands map in the Modoc County General Plan. The Canby project area has a mix of farmlands of local importance and farmlands of statewide importance (Figure 3.6-3). There are no prime farmlands within the footprint of the project.

Soils. There are six high quality agricultural soils in the Alturas area. These soils were defined by Storie Index ratings of greater than 60¹. Three types of soils are found in the Canby project area (USDA 1980).

- Pit River silty clay at the river discharge point
- Daphnedale loam in the distribution line and mechanical building area
- Barnard gravelly loam in the remaining project area

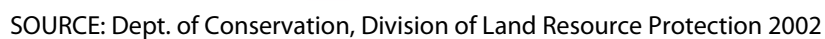
These three soil types do not fall into any of the six identified agricultural soil categories and all have a Storie Index of 24 or below. These soil mapping units meet the criteria for the category of Farmland of Statewide Importance as outlined in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's land inventory and monitoring (LIM) project for the Alturas area soil survey (USDA 1995). The Pit silty clay loam is a unit of statewide importance if protected from flooding. The project would be constructed on the levee road, not in the protected area.

Recreation

Recreation opportunities abound in Modoc County, with warm dry summers providing camping, hiking, fishing, water sports and many other outdoor activities. Winters allow cross-country and downhill skiing, ice-skating and typical winter outings. Nine hole golf courses are located in Alturas and Likely, Cedar Pass ski hill is between Alturas and Cedarville. The Warner Mountain wilderness is 18 miles long by 8 miles wide with 77 miles of trails suited for hikers and horseback riders. Trail elevations range from 7,000 to 9,000 feet. Visitors can still see turn-of-the-century towns, ranches, and farmlands.

The Modoc National Forest boundary lies approximately 5 miles south of the town of Canby. Forest Service recreational facilities provide camping for family vacationers, as well as hunters and outdoorsmen looking for facilities to use during the hunting season. The Modoc National Forest and Bureau of Land Management have many improved campgrounds with nearly 300 family camping sites available in the county. The proposed action does not lie within the forest boundary or within BLM lands.

¹ The Storie Index is a rating system, which expresses numerically the relative degree of suitability of a soil for general intensive agriculture.



REGULATORY SETTING

Federal

Farmlands Protection Policy Act of 1981. The Farmlands Protection Policy Act (FPPA) states that Federal programs which contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses will be minimized (USGS website 2002). Pertinent regulations include 516 DM 2 Appendix 2(2.2), Department of Interior and Environmental Statement Memorandum No. ESM94-7, which states the following:

- Environmental assessments must be prepared for actions which may adversely affect such unique geographic characteristics as prime farmlands
- ESM94-7 adopts as a supplement to the department's NEPA procedures the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) memorandum of August 11, 1980, "Analysis of Impacts on Prime or Unique Agricultural Lands in Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act."

State

Modoc County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The Modoc County General Plan Background Report states that protection of agricultural land is a major issue to be addressed during the revision of the General Plan. The General Plan should also develop programs and procedures, which include the appropriate agricultural agencies and officials within the County, and are designed to avoid the following:

1. Development projects which conflict with agricultural land uses,
2. Land divisions, which could lead to the creation of uneconomical land units.

The Modoc County General Plan Goals, Policies, and Action Programs report includes the following goals, policies, and actions that pertain to land use, agriculture, and recreation:

GOAL: To provide for a full range of residential land uses and housing opportunities while protecting the valuable environment and community assets of the county.

GOAL: Protect and support the agricultural economy of Modoc County.

POLICY 1: Preserve and protect valuable agricultural lands in the county.

POLICY 3: Support compatible, mixed, or alternative uses of agricultural land, including hunting and fishing clubs, and recreational ranches.

POLICY 4: Permit limited expansion of unincorporated communities in agricultural areas.

POLICY 7: Coordinate the review of any development proposals on production of agricultural land with all concerned public agencies.

POLICY 11: Consider initiating the Williamson Agricultural Land Conservation Act program in Modoc County.

ACTION PROGRAM 2: For all other agricultural lands, a minimum parcel size of 3 acres should be established under the designation general agriculture, except as otherwise permitted. When development is proposed on lands in the general agriculture category, the value of those lands for present and potential agricultural uses, such as irrigated pasture or cropland, dryland farming,

or other agricultural uses, will be considered. Soils, water availability, and the agricultural stability and future of the surrounding area are all factors that impact the value of these lands.

ACTION PROGRAM 6: The County will assist the agricultural community in identifying and promoting compatible economic ventures such as hunting clubs and dude ranches, which supplement farm income and do not take valuable agricultural land out of production. Local economic development groups should explore the feasibility of such activities as private hunting clubs, “dude” ranches, and geothermal-based recreational activities. The County should support such efforts through zoning and development permit approvals.

The land use designations set forth in the General Plan are implemented through the Zoning Ordinance, such that the various zones reflect the range of parcel sizes and uses for each general plan designation. The Modoc County Zoning Ordinance classifies all privately (and publicly) owned land into one of 15 basic zoning classifications. The project area that is south of Highway 299 is zoned as Agriculture-Exclusive (AE). The project area north of Highway 299 is zoned as Residential-Rural (RR-5). The purpose of the AE zone is to designate areas appropriate for general agriculture. The purpose of the RR-5 zone is to permit development while maintaining a rural character, and to reduce residential development impacts on the environment (Mintier Harnish 1988b).